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CITY of BOSTON

Boston Landmarks Commission presents

A WALKING TOUR OF BOSTON CITY HALL

Boston City Hall | 1 City Hall Plaza | Boston, MA 02201

Celebrating
BOSTON CITY HALL
1968-2018

BACKGROUND

In 1962, Boston held an unusual and anonymous international design competition for a new City Hall. After receiving 256 entries, the City picked a design by an unknown architectural firm, Kallmann, McKinnell, and Knowles. The intent of the design was to show an open and progressive city government

City Hall's site is a modern 60-acre government center, created by clearing the dense City blocks of historic Scollay Square. City Hall and its plaza are flanked by striking buildings designed by internationally recognized architects. This remains a significant collection of civic buildings and spaces from the modern era.

Boston City Hall is now recognized as among the most important municipal buildings of its kind in the United States. The building is also known internationally as an excellent example of "brutalism," or concrete modernism.

ENTRANCE

Boston City Hall's sweeping plaza is a dramatic forecourt to City Hall. The plaza was reportedly modeled after the Piazza del Campo in Siena, Italy. The multi-level design offers a substantial grade change from Congress Street to Cambridge Street. This helps maintain historic sightlines to Old North Church, Faneuil Hall, and the Custom House Tower.

The brick plaza flows visually into the building through glass doors, which bring visitors in at the third level. The original doors and windows at this level had no divisions between them. Revolving doors were added in 1973 to improve energy efficiency.

Floor-to-ceiling windows bring sunlight into the lobby. Recent renovations included better security, a café, and energy-efficient lighting.

Looking upwards, the seemingly inverted staircase is actually the underside of the public seating in the City Council Chambers. The skylight 126 feet above allows sunlight into the public space.

MEZZANINE

Left of the lobby is the Scollay Square Gallery. The gallery often features artwork by local artists and students. Down the escalators is the mezzanine level, where the City's public transactions take place. Another set of escalators goes down to the second floor with additional public service windows. All natural light enters the second floor from skylights.

GRAND STAIRCASE

An imposing brick grand staircase greets visitors and brings the plaza's brick surface further into the building. A landing space, used for public gatherings and events, is graced by two stone lanterns ("ishidoros"). Theses were gifted to Boston by sister city Kyoto, Japan. On the right, a corkscrew private staircase of concrete rises to the Mayor's office.

CEREMONIAL LEVEL (5th floor)

Up the set of stairs from the landing, there is a large window with a balcony overlooking Dock Square. The architects framed vistas of Faneuil Hall (1742) and behind it, Quincy Market (1826).

The fifth level overlooks the lobby below. The floor contains the offices of the Mayor, the City Council, the City Council Chambers, and the Mayor's Art Gallery. Concrete beams seemingly float between floors. Continue walking around the central atrium space and you'll find the City Council Chambers behind the glass doors. This space hosts weekly City Council meetings. The chamber appears nearly as it did in 1968, even with recent renovations for accessibility.

Above the fifth floor, there are four floors of offices for City employees working hard to keep Boston the great city it is today.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In 2017, the City of Boston received a "Keeping It Modern" grant from the Getty Foundation. This will help us fund a conservation management plan for Boston City Hall. The grant recognizes special buildings from the 20th century. The funding aims to develop a plan to guide long-term maintenance and policies.

A team of architects, historians, conservators, technical specialists, and others will undertake the study. This will guide future improvements while respecting the evolution of one of the world's most recognized municipal works of modernism. For more info visit ***rethinkcityhall.org***